MARVEL
STAR WARS
023
DARTH VADER
GILLEN
LARROCA
DELGADO

Book IV, Part IV

END OF GAMES

It is a time of rebuilding for the Empire. After the destruction of the Death Star, Darth Vader is atoning for his failure by destroying all who would oppose the Empire.

Vader's recent successes have put him back in the good graces of Emperor Palpatine, and he has therefore been sent on a vital mission: capturing the traitorous scientist Cylo, Vader's former rival. While Vader quickly dispatches Cylo's compatriot Tulon Voidgazer, her final act is setting her vessel on a collision course — with Vader still inside.

Meanwhile, the droids Triple-Zero and Beetee have been sent to capture Vader's secret ally, Dr. Aphra — but upon her delivery to the Executor, she takes advantage of their programming and changes their directive: help her escape the ship at any cost....

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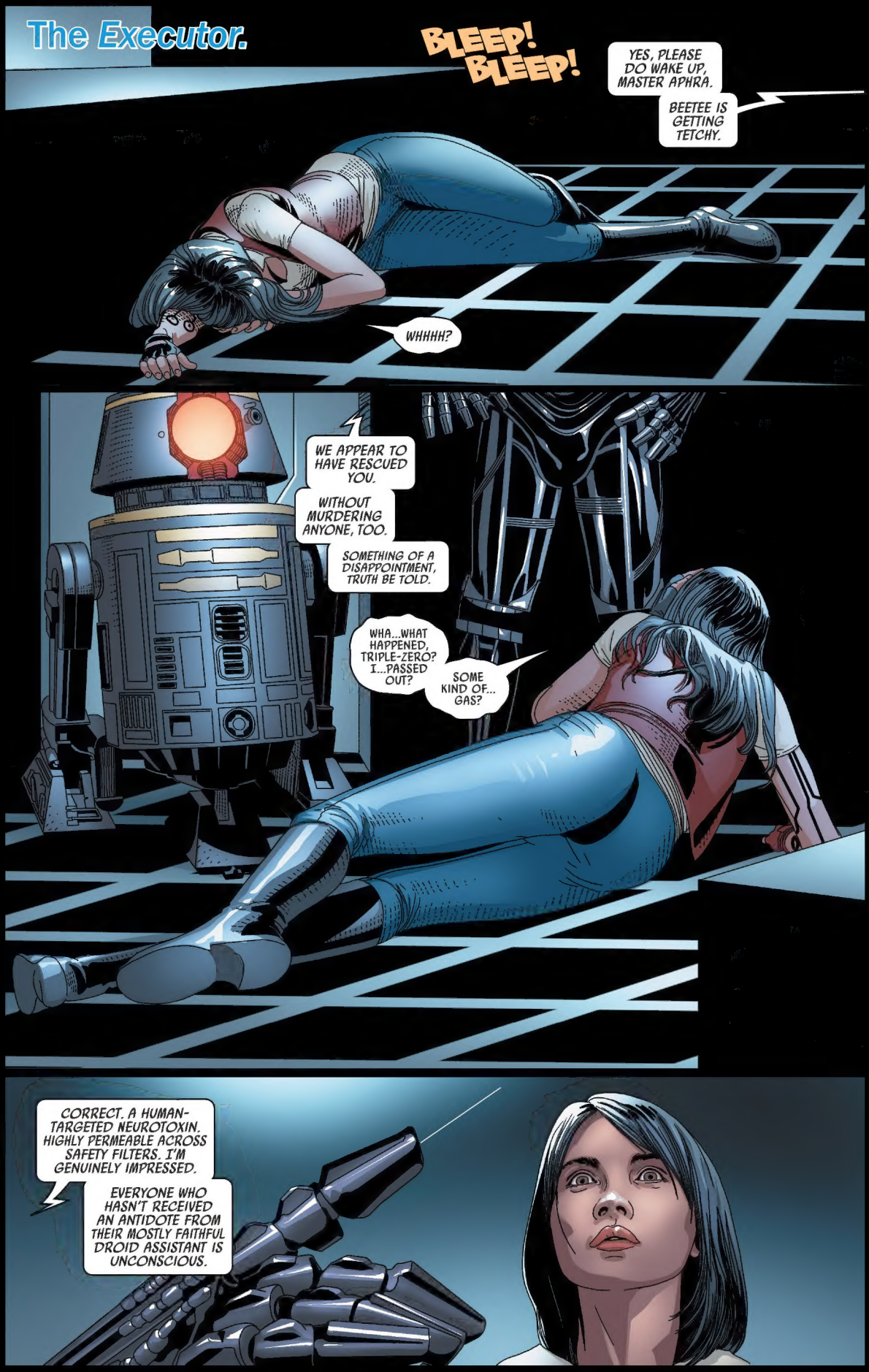

The Executor.
BLEEP! BLEEP!
YES, PLEASE DO WAKE UP, MASTER APHRA.
BEETEE IS GETTING TETCHY.
WHHHH?
WE APPEAR TO HAVE RESCUED YOU.
WITHOUT MURDERING ANYONE, TOO.
SOMETHING OF A DISAPPOINTMENT, TRUTH BE TOLD.
WHA...WHAT HAPPENED, TRIPLE-ZERO? I...PASSED OUT?
SOME KIND OF... GAS?
CORRECT. A HUMAN-TARGETED NEUROTOXIN. HIGHLY PERMEABLE ACROSS SAFETY FILTERS. I'M GENUINELY IMPRESSED.
EVERYONE WHO HASN'T RECEIVED AN ANTIDOTE FROM THEIR MOSTLY FAITHFUL DROID ASSISTANT IS UNCONSCIOUS.

BLEEP! BLEEP! BLEEP!
OH, CALM DOWN, BEETEE! I WAS GETTING TO THAT! YES, OBVIOUSLY, IT'S INEFFECTIVE AGAINST ALIENS OR DROIDS. AH, THE DISADVANTAGES OF A MONOCULTURE.
ONCE MORE, I HAVE TO QUESTION THE WISDOM OF REPLACING THE DROID ARMIES WITH FLESHY ONES.
ALL THIS EMBARRASSING SLUMPING DIDN'T HAPPEN BACK IN THE DAYS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC.
ANYWAY--WITH EVERYONE LYING DROOLING ON THE FLOOR, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO ESCAPE WITH RELATIVE EASE. BLACK KRRSANTAN IS DOCKED, AWAITING US...
WHH--
I KNOW MY HEAD'S NOT STRAIGHT, BUT...
DID THIS SHIP JUST MOVE?
CORRECT.
IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN, SOMEONE IS STEALING THE EXECUTOR, AND IS PRESUMABLY RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THE CHAOS.

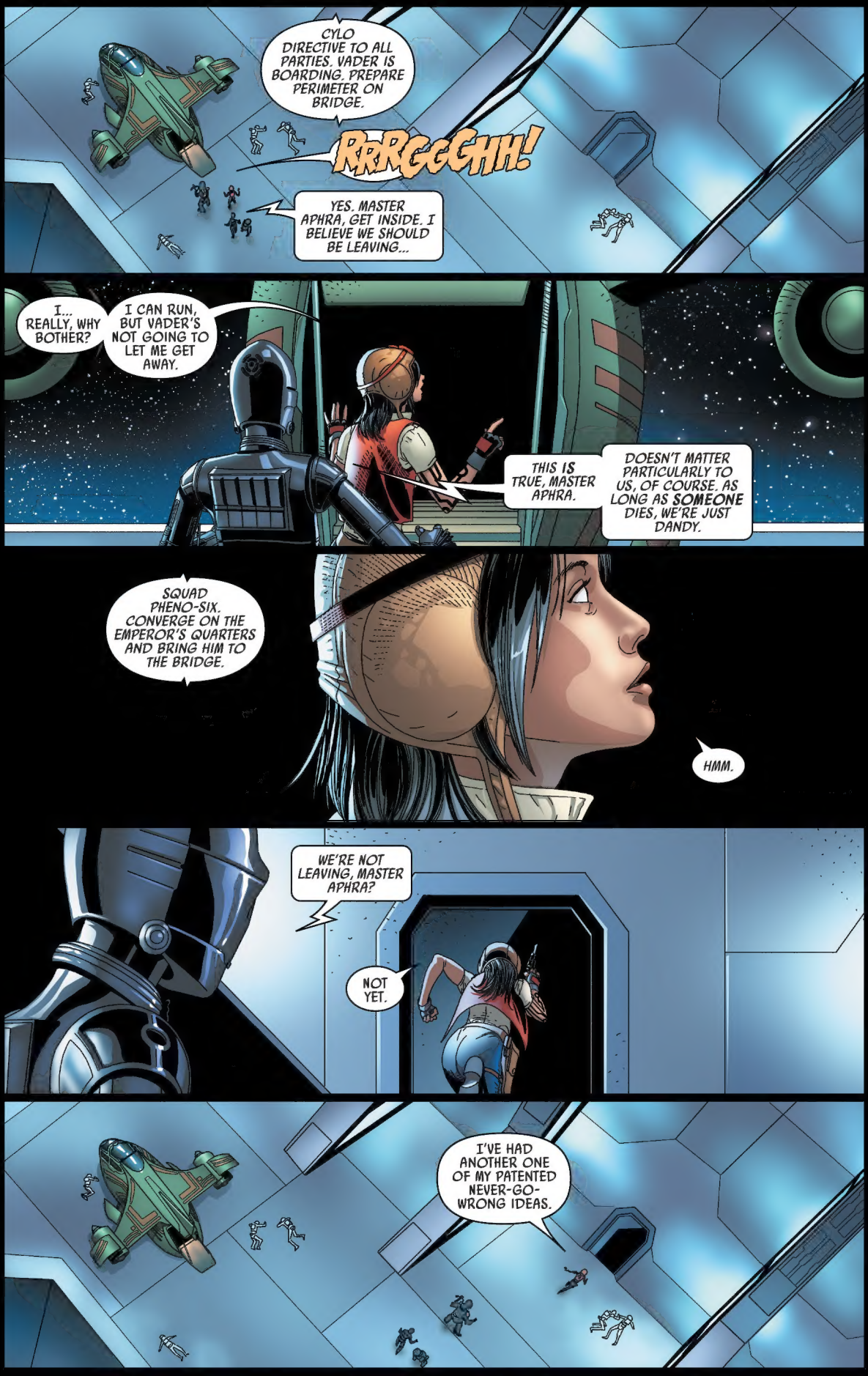
"I HAVE TO ADMIT..."
...I DO FEEL A CERTAIN SPARK OF PROFESSIONAL JEALOUSY.

WE'RE CLEAR OF THE DOCKS, CYLO.
THEN WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, MORIT?
"ACTIVATE THE ION CHARGES."

ALL PURSUIT DEAD IN SPACE, CYLO. THEY WON'T EVEN BE ABLE TO SIGNAL...
THANK YOU ONCE MORE, DOCTOR VOIDGAZER.
YOUR WORK ALWAYS WAS EXEMPLARY.
GENIUSES LIKE US MADE THIS SHIP. IT'S ONLY JUST THAT WE SHOULD HAVE IT. NOTHING CAN STOP US NOW.
SET COURSE FOR--
WHAT'S HAPPENED? WE'VE STOPPED.
THE ENGINES ARE DEAD.

VADER TO BRIDGE...
YOU HAVE LOST CONTROL OF THE ENGINES.
YOU WILL NOT BE ESCAPING.
I AM COMING FOR YOU.

VADER. HMPH.
BUT...WE SAW THE FLAGSHIP SMASH ITSELF TO PIECES AGAINST THE SIDE OF THE EXECUTOR!
THERE'S NO WAY HE COULD HAVE SURVIVED.
I'D IMAGINE HE MANAGED TO EJECT AND LAND ON THE EXECUTOR'S HULL BEFORE SLICING HIS WAY IN TO FRUSTRATE ME FURTHER.
HOW HE SURVIVED DOESN'T MATTER. HE MUST SURVIVE NO LONGER.
LET ME DESTROY HIM!
I AM THE MISSILE YOU SPENT A LIFETIME CRAFTING, ON FINAL APPROACH TO ITS TARGET. I--
NO. HE IS COMING HERE. WE MUST USE THAT.
DIVIDE TROOPS BETWEEN GUARDING THE BRIDGE AND A RETRIEVAL SQUAD.
IT SEEMS WE HAVE ESPECIALLY PRECIOUS CARGO. THE EMPEROR IS ABOARD. BRING THE DOG'S MASTER TO ME.
MEANWHILE, YOU WILL TRAVEL ACROSS THE SURFACE OF THE EXECUTOR, AVOID VADER THEN REROUTE THE ENGINES.
AND IF ALL ELSE FAILS... I RISK THE ALTERNATIVE.

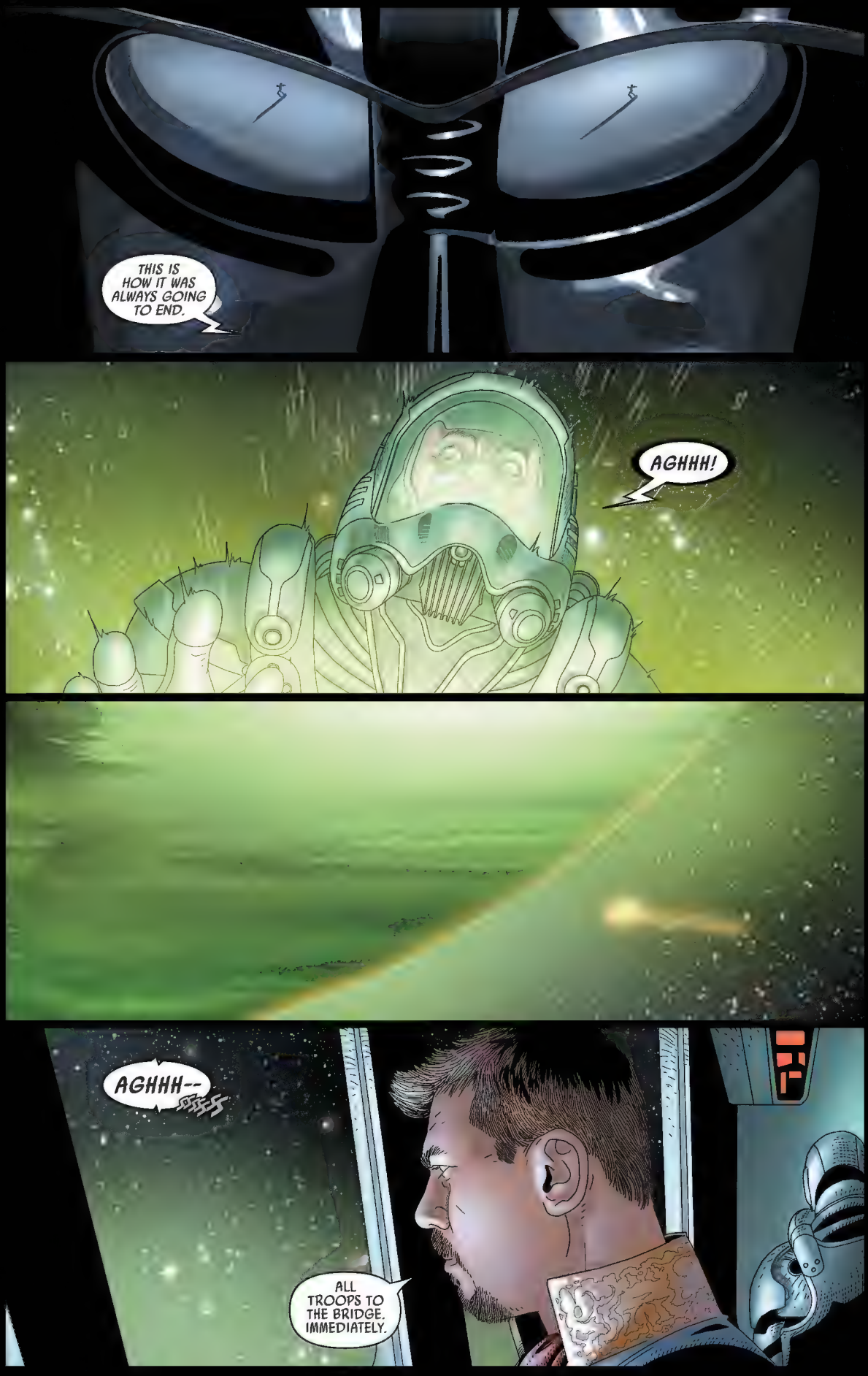

CYLO DIRECTIVE TO ALL PARTIES. VADER IS BOARDING. PREPARE PERIMETER ON BRIDGE.
RRRGGGHH!
YES. MASTER APHRA, GET INSIDE. I BELIEVE WE SHOULD BE LEAVING...
I... REALLY, WHY BOTHER?
I CAN RUN, BUT VADER'S NOT GOING TO LET ME GET AWAY.
THIS IS TRUE, MASTER APHRA.
DOESN'T MATTER PARTICULARLY TO US, OF COURSE. AS LONG AS SOMEONE DIES, WE'RE JUST DANDY.
SQUAD PHENO-SIX. CONVERGE ON THE EMPEROR'S QUARTERS AND BRING HIM TO THE BRIDGE.
HMM.
WE'RE NOT LEAVING, MASTER APHRA?
NOT YET.
I'VE HAD ANOTHER ONE OF MY PATENTED NEVER-GO-WRONG IDEAS.

YOU ARE QUICKER THAN I THOUGHT, MORIT...
...BUT JUST AS PREDICTABLE.
I ALWAYS KNEW IT WOULD END LIKE THIS.
YOU AND ME. THE OLD VERSUS THE NEW.
YOU ARE CORRECT, CHILD.

THIS ENDS.

GET THE DOOR OPEN. CYLO WANTS THE EMPEROR ON THE BRIDGE IMMEDIATELY!
IT'LL BE OPEN SHORTLY, SIR. JUST CUTTING THE L--
LEAVE THE POOR DEFENSELESS EMPEROR ALONE!
WHAT HAS HE EVER DONE TO HURT ANYONE?
RRRGGGHHHH!

HA!
YOU WERE RIGHT.


THIS IS HOW IT WAS ALWAYS GOING TO END.
AGHHH!
AGHHH--
SSSSS
ALL TROOPS TO THE BRIDGE. IMMEDIATELY.

WHY ARE YOU EVEN HERE, KRRSANTAN?
RRRGGGGHHH!
I... OWE YOU MONEY?
DON'T YOU THINK THERE COMES A TIME YOU SHOULD WRITE OFF YOUR BAD DEBTS?
RGGGHHHHH!
HEY! NO NEED FOR THAT! I AGREE!
I'M GOOD FOR IT.
YEAH, ADD THAT ONE TO MY TAB.
AND HIM... WAIT!
THEY'RE PULLING BACK...

"...AND I BET I KNOW WHERE THEY'RE GOING."

LORD VADER.
YOUR MACHINES ARE INSUFFICIENT.
PERHAPS.
BUT YOU FORGET...

YOU ARE ONE OF MY MACHINES, TOO.
KLIK
I'VE KEPT THIS FOR TWENTY YEARS, JUST IN CASE.
I DIDN'T WANT TO USE IT. IT WAS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT MY PRIVATE ACCESS WOULD HAVE BEEN DISABLED IN THE YEARS SINCE I HELPED REBUILD YOUR BODY.
BUT IT APPEARS I WAS OVERLY CONCERNED, AND I COULD HAVE TURNED OFF YOUR CYBERNETICS ANY TIME I WANTED.
YOU WERE NEVER A THREAT TO ME. I COULD HAVE ALWAYS BROUGHT YOU TO YOUR KNEES WITH A SINGLE CLICK OF A BUTTON...
I OFTEN WONDERED WHETHER WHAT ROSE FROM OUR OPERATING TABLE WAS A MACHINE OR A MAN...

GOOD TO HAVE AN ANSWER.

DARTH VADER

NEXT ISSUE:

Tour
THE SEVEN SEAS
With
BLACK MANTA
EMPIRE
Call 555-FISH